

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER  
LISTED

FEB 09 2005

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Plaza Theater

other names/site number Flint Hills Opry; The Music Box Theater

2. Location

street & number 404 Neosho Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Burlington [N/A] vicinity

state Kansas code KS county Coffey code 031 zip code 66839

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  
☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the  
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In  
my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be  
considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Christy Davis, Deputy SHPO Date 12/23/07

Kansas State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].  
☐ determined eligible for the  
National Register  
See continuation sheet [ ].  
☐ determined not eligible for the  
National Register.  
☐ removed from the  
National Register  
☐ other, explain  
See continuation sheet [ ].

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Coffey County, KS

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**5. Classification**

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**Ownership of Property**

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

**Category of Property**

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
Contributing      Noncontributing

1 buildings  
sites  
structures  
objects  
1 Total

**Name of related multiple property listing.**

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of  
Kansas

**Number of contributing resources  
previously listed in the National  
Register.**

0

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**6. Function or Use**

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**Historic Function**

RECREATION & CULTURE: Movie Theater

**Current Functions**

RECREATION & CULTURE: Theater

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**7. Description**

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**Architectural Classification**

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

**Materials**

Foundation: Concrete  
Walls: Tile  
Roof: Asphalt  
Other: Structural Glass  
Glass Block  
Brick

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

Architecture

Recreation/Culture

### Periods of Significance

1942-1955

### Significant Dates

1942

### Significant Person(s)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Hauetter, Al

## Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

# \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

# \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☐ Local Government

☐ University

☒ Other:

Name of repository: Coffey County Historical Society

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property less than 1 acre**UTM References**A. Zone Easting Northing  
15 260138 4230986N

B. Zone Easting Northing

C. Zone Easting Northing

D. Zone Easting Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Kristen Ottesen, Architectural Historian and Elizabeth Rosin, Partnerorganization Historic Preservation Services, LLC date June 2004street & number 323 West 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 112 telephone 816-221-5133city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64105**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black-and-white photographs** of the property.**Additional Items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name David Woogestreet & number 509 N. Hickory Street telephone 785-242-3346city or town Ottawa state KS zip code 66067

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Plaza Theater  
Coffey County, Kansas

## SUMMARY DESCRIPTION STATEMENT

The Plaza Theater, located at 404 Neosho Street, Burlington, Coffey County, Kansas, is a two-story brick building with a glazed tile façade. The building, which is approximately 110 feet deep and 50 feet wide, is part of the commercial corridor in the historic center of Burlington. The Plaza Theater exhibits the general form and configuration of the movie theater property type that appeared throughout American small town commercial districts during the first half of the twentieth century. It was built in 1942 with Moderne styling that is sleek and streamlined. The use of modern materials such as tile, glass block, and structural glass creates bold geometric lines on the façade. With the majority of its character-defining stylistic features and original exterior materials intact, the Plaza Theater retains a high degree of architectural integrity.

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### SETTING

The Plaza Theater is on Burlington's main historic commercial street. It sits on the northwest corner of the prominent intersection of Neosho Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Street (U.S. Route 75). The Neosho River runs just north of the theater. To the east of the theater is an open lot that contains a railroad caboose and public restroom facilities owned by the Chamber of Commerce. To the west of the theater is an early twentieth century two-part commercial block building that shares a party wall with the theater. The theater's primary façade directly abuts the concrete sidewalk. A paved parking lot is at the rear of the building.

### EXTERIOR

The primary (south) façade has three bays defined by a central block flanked by two shorter wings that project slightly in front of the main building wall. A stone foundation supports the south, east, and west walls. The rear (north) wall, which is an extension from the original rear wall, rests on a concrete foundation. Steel bow trusses support the roof, which is covered by a rubberized membrane.

Glazed ceramic tile in cream, green, yellow, and dark brown create the



*Music Box Theater*

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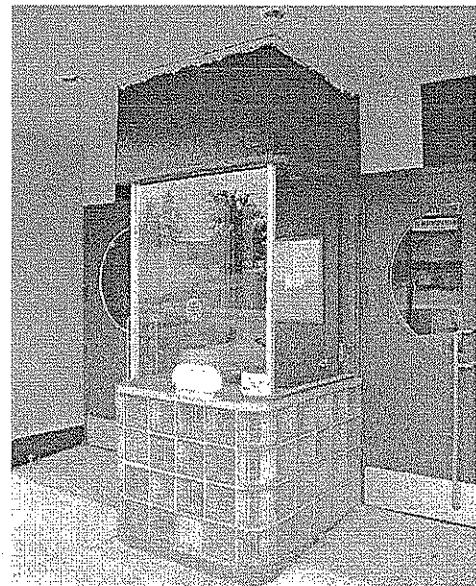
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Coffey County, Kansas

streamlined, Moderne style appearance of the primary (south) façade and the south end of the east wall. The central bay incorporates the marquee area and entrance. Rectangular cream-colored tile covers the wall of the upper portions of the bay except for a wide vertical ribbon of rectangular buff and brown tile installed in alternating horizontal rows that bisect the bay, creating a central panel.

A three-sided metal marquee projects from the wall above the entrance. It features minimal ornament, including neon tubing and vertical brackets on the front that are the same color as the tile bands on the façade. Two new "Music Box" signs have been added on each side of the marquee, covering the original "Plaza" signs.

Below the marquee, the central bay contains the glass block ticket booth flanked by the theater entrances, both of which retain their original double-leaf wood doors with portal windows and streamlined metal hardware. Mounted on the walls on either side of the front entrance and the east wall are original metal-framed poster display cases. Ornamenting the primary façade entrance is a veneer of green and black pigmented structural glass panels manufactured by Pittsburgh Glass.



*Plaza Theater Ticket Booth*

The bays flanking the central core also feature rectangular cream-colored tile cladding. At the juncture of the first and second stories, a horizontal band of vertical strips created by alternating bands of yellow and brown tile, incorporate single small square window openings. Six-over-six, double-hung, vinyl windows with applied muntins replace the original steel casement windows.

The most distinctive features on the primary façade's end bays are the portal display windows in the doors that compose the storefront in each bay. The green tile that encircles the windows starkly contrasts with the cream-colored body tile and sets off the unique fenestration.

The west elevation shares a wall with the adjacent building. The brick wall on the east elevation is exposed to the rear (north) end of the wall. The tiled south end of the east elevation carries the decorative theme of the front façade around the corner. Two large openings in the center of the rear (north) elevation are approximately half a story off the ground. The west end has two doors at ground level and the east end has one door on the ground level. Painted signage advertising the Music Box is on the brick wall in the center of the elevation and a painted sign for the Coffey County Museum is on the west end.

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**INTERIOR**

The plan of the Plaza Theater is that of a typical Main Street movie theater of its era. The lobby is directly inside the front entrance. Flanking the lobby are two small "storefronts" that open into the lobby and have separate entrances from the sidewalk. The storefront to the east was converted into the women's restroom. The lobby interior is simply appointed with floral-patterned carpet covering the floor, white plaster and drywall walls, and a dropped ceiling with removable panels. The original movie poster cases on the east and west walls match those on the exterior.

A partition separates the concession area from the lobby. Two large openings on either end effectively convert the partition into a single square column in the center of the space. On the north wall, the curvilinear concession stand and the ceiling above it are painted fuchsia. The curved east and west ends of the plaster wall opposite the concession area reflect the Moderne styling of the theater. Two single doors flanking the concession area lead to the auditorium.

The auditorium's plaster walls curve at the northeast and northwest corners. To improve acoustics, drapes of rust-colored fabric cover the side walls. Composition tile covers the concrete floors, although carpet matching that in the lobby covers the aisles. Like the lobby, the auditorium ceiling is a non-historic dropped ceiling with removable panels. The upholstered metal seats may be original.

The stage spans the width of the north end of the auditorium. It was expanded into the auditorium space to accommodate live and musical performances. Stairs provide access to the front of the stage.

Flights of stairs at the southeast and southwest corners of the auditorium lead to the original projection booth, office, restrooms, and a cry room.

**INTEGRITY**

The Plaza Theater continues to reflect its historic function as an entertainment venue. The building retains its original form, plan, proportions, scale, and massing. All of its historic character-defining elements and original materials remain intact on the exterior, including the tile veneer, structural glass panels, doors, and first-story windows. Although some of the historic interior finishes were replaced, the theater retains its original configuration of spaces. The building retains a high degree of integrity and clearly communicates its historic associations and feelings as an entertainment venue.

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Coffey County, Kansas

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Plaza Theater building at 404 Neosho Street in Burlington, Kansas is significant under National Register Criterion A for the area of RECREATION/CULTURE and under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE as documented in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) "Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas." The Plaza Theater has direct associations with the historic context "Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, 1854-1954," developed as part of the MPDF and meets the MPDF registration requirements. Constructed in 1942 on one of Burlington's main commercial streets, it is an excellent example of the small movie theater property type constructed in Kansas and throughout the United States in the mid-twentieth century. While the use and form of many similar theaters were often drastically altered for other commercial endeavors when larger and more modern movie houses opened in their vicinity, the Plaza Theater is intact and its current use as a live performance venue complements its original use. It is also notable for its Moderne style façade, which incorporated progressive materials such as glass block, structural pigmented glass panels, and glazed ceramic tile that were not common in small Kansas towns at that time. Its period of significance begins with its construction in 1942 and concludes in 1955, the fifty-year threshold for National Register eligibility.

## PROPERTY HISTORY

The Plaza Theater was built in 1942 by proprietor Warren L. Weber who employed the architectural services of Al Hauetter. The new Plaza Theater replaced an earlier Plaza Theater, which operated for one year before the owners erected the new theater. The new Plaza Theater competed with the Newk Theater, located in the 200 block of Third Street. The Newk Theaters was the only other theater in town and the owners placed an ad in the March 24, 1942 *Daily Republican* congratulating Warren Weber on his beautiful new theater and urging the community to actively support both cinemas.

To celebrate the grand opening of the Plaza Theater, Weber chose a special program of movies for the first week. He selected "Shut My Big Mouth" starring Joe E. Brown as the opening movie on Thursday night because "it is a comedy and will give folks plenty of opportunity to laugh."<sup>1</sup> On Friday and Saturday the theater showed Gene Autry's "Under Fiesta Stars" and Rita Haworth and Fred Astaire in "You'll Never Get Rich" as a double feature. On Sunday and Monday Bob Hope starred in "Louisiana Purchase," which was Technicolor picture. Closing out opening week, "Shepherd of the Hills" with Harold Bell Wright played in Technicolor on Wednesday and Thursday.

Warren L. Weber was born around 1909 and grew up in Olathe, Kansas. When he was eight years old, he

<sup>1</sup> "Joe E. Brown to Appear in Opening at the New Plaza," *Daily Republican*, 24 March 1942.



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distributed advertising bills for a theater. In 1920, when his father took over management of a theater in Great Bend, Kansas, he took tickets, cleaned and made repairs, and played the electric organ, supplying the music that accompanied silent films. By 1927, the younger Weber acquired his first theater in Ellinwood, Kansas, which was a success. After his father's death in 1934, Weber moved to St. John, Kansas to manage the DeLuxe Theater. Three years later, he bought and remodeled the Nueva Theater in Stafford, Kansas, which was previously destroyed by a fire. By the time he built the Plaza Theater in Burlington, he owned "four of the most modern and best equipped theatres in towns of Kansas comparable in size to Burlington."<sup>2</sup>

Weber had an established relationship with architect Al Hauetter, who previously designed three theaters for him. With offices in Kansas City, Missouri, Hauetter was an interior designer who specialized in theater design. At the time he designed the Plaza Theater in Burlington, Hauetter had experience designing and remodeling thirty theaters throughout the Midwest. Notably, in 1937 he designed the new lobby for the Sun Theater in Kansas City, Missouri, selected as "the most outstanding theatre lobby in the United States" in 1942.<sup>3</sup> Hauetter also worked on the Rustic Theater at Yellowstone National Park, designing with quarried stone and timber in a style to "bring back the atmosphere of the early western architecture."

At the time of its construction, the Plaza Theater was a very modern, up-to-date theater. The use of modern materials on the exterior and the sleek Moderne form of the façade hinted at the new features and technologies found inside. The theater, which had a 536-person seating capacity, featured twenty-four "love seats" arranged throughout the center of the auditorium.<sup>4</sup> The recessed lighting in the ceiling supposedly reduced the glare on eyeglasses. While there was no balcony, on the second floor, at the rear (south end) of the auditorium, there was a cry room, which was a fairly new invention in theater design at the time. The cry room was a soundproof room separated from the auditorium by glass so that mothers and children could watch the movie without disturbing others in the audience.

Notable for its fireproof construction, the Plaza Theater had a steel floor and roof structure. Constructed of reinforced concrete from the basement up, ensured that in the event of fire, the projection room would not collapse onto the lobby. When it was cold outside, a modern forced air furnace heated the theater;

<sup>2</sup> *The Daily Republican*, 24 March 1942, Coffey County Historical Society and Museum, Burlington, Kansas, Microfilm.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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when it was hot outside, cooled air from ceiling vents kept the patrons comfortable. Due to the proximity of the Neosho River, flooding was a frequent occurrence and the theater was equipped with a steel waterproof door to hold out floodwaters. They installed three electric pumps with a capacity of three thousand gallons of water per hour in the basement in case "seepage of flood waters" occurred.<sup>5</sup> The Plaza Theater survived several floods after its construction.

Around 1989, the Plaza Theater began operating as a live performance venue, known as the Flint Hills Opry, or simply as "the Opry." Later, the theater continued as a live performance venue under the name "the Music Box." In December 2003, David Wooge, the current owner, purchased the Plaza Theater and continued offering weekly live musical performances.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

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## GEOGRAPHIC DATA

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot 13, Block 40, Town of Burlington, Coffey County, Kansas

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This nomination includes the parcel of land that is historically associated with the resource.

## PHOTOGRAPH LOG

Photographer: Kristen Ottesen  
Date of Photographs: May 2004  
Location of Negatives: Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas

### Photograph

#### Number

#### Camera View

1. Streetscape, view to the northwest
2. Front (south) façade
3. Front (south) façade
4. Rear elevations, view to the southeast
5. Box office
6. Main entry doors
7. West end of the south façade at ground level
8. Lobby, view to the southeast
9. Concession area from lobby, view to the northwest
10. Concession area, view to the west
11. Rear of auditorium

